

## **SURVIVING IN MURAFĂ GHETTO: A CASE STUDY OF ONE GHETTO IN TRANSNISTRIA \***

### **Abstract**

*The present study examines the case of the Murafa Ghetto in Transnistria, with a focus on the social processes evolving in the Ghetto. It distinguishes between deportees from different places in Romania, who came from different backgrounds and cultures, and the local indigenous Jews who lived all their lives in the Ghetto, and their different struggles to survive. The central research question concerns the development of social processes among the different populations in Murafa and the influence of the disparity between these populations on the way of life in the Ghetto and on the ability of its residents to endure and survive the harsh living conditions. In connection with this issue, the article deals with the role played by the Ghetto leadership and the Ghetto management style, which were crucial for the survival of the Jewish population in general.*

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## **Introduction**

The present study explores the case of the Murafa Ghetto in Transnistria and deals with the issues related to the daily coping strategies of the inhabitants and their struggle for survival from 1941 to 1944. Focusing on the social processes evolving in the Ghetto, it distinguishes between the groups of deportees from different places in Romania, mainly from Bessarabia and Bucovina, and the local indigenous Jewish population. The disparities between the various population groups arriving in Murafa resulted from the differences in their deportation conditions and dates, their different political and cultural backgrounds, and the considerable economic disparities that characterized their former way of life. As in other ghettos in Transnistria that were comprised of local Jews and deportees from different places in Romania, the demographic mix resulted in a complex multicultural, social, and economic situation. However, unlike the populations of other ghettos in Transnistria, a dominant group of affluent deportees from Southern Bucovina formed a majority and determined the rules of conduct in the Murafa Ghetto.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of these issues, this research examines the role played by the Murafa Ghetto leadership (comprising deportees from Southern Bucovina) and the Ghetto's management style as significant factors in the survival of the Jewish population. The main argument of this paper is that despite the artificial demographic structure and the great disparities within the Ghetto population, the Jews managed to establish an order that assisted the weaker elements to survive, though relative feelings of deprivation still persisted among the poorer minority population. Moreover, it may be suggested that the relatively high survival rate in the Ghetto was at least partially attributable to the self-organization of the inhabitants – though it did not evolve peacefully and without friction – as well as their ability to negotiate with the Romanian authorities.

Contemporary documentation from many ghettos tells of the gap between the privileged and the poor. However, in comparison to other ghettos in Eastern Europe, as well as to Transnistria itself, the late self-organization of the Murafa Ghetto is uncommon. The literature of major ghettos in Poland or smaller ghettos in Lithuania,<sup>2</sup> such as Kovno and Shavli, tells a different story of a much faster self-organization.<sup>3</sup> In these ghettos, the social disparity was also apparent, with the poorer groups in the ghetto usually comprised of the refugees and the lower social classes from the Jewish population prior to the war. Yet, unlike the ghettos in Poland and Lithuania, where the population was

comprised mostly of local Jews who shared previous organizational patterns, the demographic makeup of the Murafa Ghetto, as in other ghettos in Transnistria, was of deportees who were alien to the surroundings.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the exceptional polarization between the different groups in the small Murafa Ghetto, the special contacts formed with the local Jews, and the mutual aid that evolved within the community made Murafa Ghetto a unique case as compared to other ghettos. Thus, although this case study focuses on a region that was not under direct German authority, interesting conclusions can be reached on similarities and differences within the ghetto phenomenon as a whole.

The sources used for this research include archival documentation of the period from the Yad Vashem Archive, as well as contemporaneous diaries which were edited after the Holocaust, memoirs written by survivors, and Yizkor books published by the congregations of Bucovina and Bessarabia. Extensive use was also made of oral testimonies collected in the Yad Vashem Archive. For the purpose of the present study, I conducted further interviews (both individual and collective), which enabled a richer description of daily life in the Ghetto despite the long time that has passed since these events.

### **Deportation of the Jews to Transnistria and the ghettoization policy**

Transnistria, an area of about 40,000 square kilometers in the southern part of the Ukraine, stretches between the Dniester River in the west and the Bug River in the east. Transnistria was never annexed to Romania and Romanian law was never applied there, though a governor on behalf of the Romanian regime, Alexianu Gheorghe, was appointed. More than half of the 331,000 Jews in the district lived in Odessa (200,961 Jews), the largest city in the area, comprising more than 600,000 residents. The non-Jewish Ukrainian population lived in small villages, and its residents were mostly farmers. Transnistria was first occupied on 15 July, 1941 by the German army (S.S. members and Einsatzgruppe D units).<sup>5</sup> The first wave of mass killings of the local Jews was accomplished by the Einsatzgruppe D with the help of the Romanian army and soon after in a collaborative operation with the Romanian army (soldiers of the third and fourth Romanian army)<sup>6</sup>. Other auxiliary forces were the "Vomi" units<sup>7</sup>. Not all the local Jews were murdered in this first wave, and the scope of the mission, the size of the area, and the need for the Einsatzgruppe D units to advance with the German army

prevented them from completing their mission.<sup>8</sup> By the end of 1941, however, fewer than 20,000 local Jews remained in Transnistria.

At the beginning of the war in Romania, in the summer of 1941, both the regions of Bessarabia and northern Bucovina, which had been annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1940, were retaken by the Romanian Gendarmerie and the German army. Subsequently, the Romanians Gendarmerie and army carried out large massacres of the Jews in these regions,<sup>9</sup> killing 150,000-160,000 Jews within two months (July-August 1941). The remnants of these Jewish communities were deported to Transnistria.<sup>10</sup> Another 150,000 Jews from the two regions were deported to Transnistria in the fall of 1941 upon the command of Antonescu, ruler of the Romanian government at that time (see Figure 1).

In the late fall of 1941, the Jews of southern Bucovina who were never under Soviet rule, were also deported to Transnistria following the wish of Antonescu to cleanse Romania of the Jewish population.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of 1941, 188,712 Jews had been deported in total (96,867 Jews from Bessarabia, 82,478 Jews from Bucovina, and 9,367 Jews from Dorohoi and neighboring towns).<sup>12</sup> In the spring-summer months of 1942, another 4,521 Jews were deported from Bessarabia (4,290 Jews) and Bucovina (231 Jews)<sup>13</sup> (see Figure 2). However, according to the census of September 1943, approximately two years after the deportees from Bessarabia had arrived in Transnistria, only 15,000 had survived. Thus, they had lost about 85% of their original number. The proportion of survivors among the Bessarabian Jews in Transnistria was low in comparison with that of survivors from southern Bucovina. The differences between these groups resulted from both the deportation conditions and the conditions under which the deportees began their lives in Transnistria.

Indeed, each of the deported groups had its own unique characteristics and history.

**The Jews of Bessarabia** had been traumatized during their one year under Soviet rule. During that time, much of their community structure was abolished and many of their leaders were deported to Siberia.<sup>14</sup> They also suffered economically as businesses and small enterprises were nationalized and confiscated. Thus, the Jewish bourgeois and middle classes of Bessarabia were lost.<sup>15</sup>

**As for Bucovina**, the region had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to WW1, and the Jews thus became assimilated into the German culture and spoke the German language.<sup>16</sup> Between the two world wars, the region was part of the Romanian state and great effort was put into its Romanization. Therefore, the annexation of North Bucovina to the Soviet Union in June 1940 was traumatic to the Jews. They too, like the communities in Bessarabia, went through hardships under the Soviet regime that affected their social structure and economy. They also lost a great part of their leadership.<sup>17</sup> Following the mass murders of the Jews of Bessarabia and northern Bucovina, those deportees who survived to reach the transfer points near the Dniester River were already mere remnants of their previous families and had been robbed of their assets and belongings. To this one should include the fact that most of the Bessarabian Jews were deported to the eastern and southern parts of Transnistria, by Convoys where the rate of death and killings was much higher than in other deportation areas in Transnistria.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that the large and major city of Cernauti was also under the Soviet regime.

Unlike Bessarabia and northern Bucovina, South Bucovina had never been under Soviet annexation nor had they experienced mass murder or blanket confiscation of their assets. As a result, the communities and the economic situation of the Jews there had not been radically transformed.<sup>19</sup> Still maintaining a community structure and in some cases an established leadership, they were able to elevate some of their harsh conditions, such as going by train (albeit cattle train cars) rather than marching to the transfer points at the Dniester River.<sup>20</sup>

To summarize the deportation phase from Bessarabia and Bucovina to Transnistria, it can be said that by the end of 1941, 188,712 Jews were deported in total (96,867 from Bessarabia, 82,478 Jews from Bucovina, and 9,367 Jews from Dorohoi and neighboring towns)<sup>21</sup>. In the spring-summer months of 1942, another 4,521 Jews were deported from Bessarabia (4,290 Jews) and Bucovina (231 Jews).<sup>22</sup> (See Figure 2)

### **Arrival of the deportees to Murafa**

Murafa is a town and village in Mogilev County, belonging to the district of Shargorod,<sup>23</sup> where a Jewish community had existed from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At the outbreak of the Second World War, some of the Jews were recruited into the Red Army. Others fled out of fear of the Nazis, who invaded in June 1941, but the Germans caught

and killed them.<sup>24</sup> Those who survived returned to their homes, making for a total population of 800 Jews living in Murafa in the fall of 1941.<sup>25</sup>

Administratively, Murafa belonged to the county of Mogilev, but was annexed directly to the Shargorod Ghetto, where the headquarters of the Gendarmerie were located.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, there was a representative of the civil Romanian administration, the pretor Yozef Dindelegan, who was in charge of the district of Shargorod. The military rule of the town of Murafa was in the hands of the Gendarmes Unit, and the town was also headed by a "Starosta" (a Ukrainian mayor) and a Ukrainian militia station. Murafa was comprised of two distinct areas: **1)** Old Murafa, where the Jews were concentrated, with Ukrainians living at the end of the quarter; and **2)** the northern part of Murafa, called New Murafa, where most of the inhabitants were Christian Ukrainians.

Poverty was evidenced by "the lack of goods and basic objects for daily use, lack of awareness of the importance of cleanliness and, as a consequence, lack of sanitary and hygienic conditions in the houses and in the town."<sup>27</sup> No medicines were supplied to the Ghetto, leading to the eruption of the typhoid epidemics that were one of the major causes of death of many deportees.<sup>28</sup> Thus, **the period between the fall of 1941 and the spring-summer of 1942** was characterized by the deportees' need to cope with the harsh conditions that were unfamiliar to them.<sup>29</sup>

During the period from the fall of 1941 until January 1942, approximately 3500 people arrived in Murafa, mostly from South Bukovina and the Dorohoi district. The first group, which numbered about 150 families, had been deported from southern Bucovina (Suceava, Kimpulung, Gura Humorului, Radauti).<sup>30</sup> Several activists with initiative, courage and leadership skills such as Nahum Bakal of Suceava, Fucs of Suceava, Sternshus of Kimpulung, Dr. Drimer of Radautz, Pechholz and Dr. Schechter of Itzkani<sup>31</sup>, all of whom had already been public activists in their hometown. They managed to bribe the local gendarmes in Mogilev, so that their family members, relatives or other deportees from their hometowns could get to Murafa with all their belongings in rented German trucks with a German driver and escort.<sup>32</sup>

Many deportees who had escaped from other places or from convoys also flowed into Murafa, among them deportees from Bessarabia, northern Bucovina, and Cernauti. These deportees were frequently exposed to abuse by Romanian farmers, soldiers, and gendarmes during their wanderings. Many of them were miserable and destitute, and all

had experienced trauma, having lost their homes, all their possessions and in many cases their loved ones. Their testimonies reveal that when they reached Murafa, they had almost no clothes, were hunger stricken, and were in a deteriorated physical and mental condition.<sup>33</sup>

The period between the fall of 1941 and the spring-summer of 1942 was characterized by the deportees' need to cope with the hardships of hunger, cold, and disease that were unfamiliar to them.<sup>34</sup> The living conditions in Murafa were described by the deportees' testimonies as "primitive and impossible."<sup>35</sup> Most were housed in public and derelict buildings. Poverty was evidenced by "the lack of goods and basic objects for daily use, lack of awareness of the importance of cleanliness and, as a consequence, lack of sanitary and hygienic conditions in the houses and in the town." No medicine was supplied to the Ghetto, leading to the eruption of the typhoid epidemics that were one of the major causes of death of many deportees.<sup>36</sup>

One should remember that all the deportees experienced trauma, had lost their homes, all their possessions and in many cases their loved ones.

Gendarmerie data of September 1943 indicate that 800 local Jews and 2,605 deportees lived in Murafa: 2,179 (74%) deportees from Bucovina and 426 (26%) deportees from Bessarabia. These data indicate that the deportees from Bucovina constituted the majority of the Ghetto population (see Figure 3). Other data, taken from the statistics of the Help Committee of Bucharest from March 1943, indicate that 800 local Jews and 3,700 deportees were residing in Murafa, amounting to a total of 4,500 Jews. According to these figures, the deported Jews constituted 82% of the Jewish population of Murafa,<sup>37</sup> indicating that over a very short period of time, the deportees had become the great majority of the Murafa residents, while the indigenous population was relegated to a minority status in their own town. The economic situation of the local Jews was already dire because of the war. The arrival of the deportees from Bucovina even further undermined the position of the few local Jews that were left in Murafa. Their homes became more overcrowded, their socio-economic status rendered them weak, and they assumed an inferior position in the Ghetto. However, deportees' testimonies indicate that they were received with a warm welcome by the local Jews, who offered them accommodations for rent.<sup>38</sup>

Soon after the first deportees' arrival in Murafa, an ordinance, known as Ordinance 23, was issued by the Romanian authorities on 11 November 1941.<sup>39</sup> This ordinance, which was enacted by the governor of Transnistria, Alexianu Gheorghe, required that the Jews be concentrated and organized in ghettos in all aspects related to their life and work. According to the ordinance, a Jewish leader was to be appointed to head the local community, exit from the Ghetto was to be restricted, and all contact with anyone outside the Ghetto or with other parties in Romania (family, friends, community, etc.) was to be forbidden.<sup>40</sup> The ordinance further stated that for their livelihood, the Jews would be exploited as forced laborers in various projects and would be recompensed for their work with one mark for an unskilled laborer and two marks for an artisan<sup>41</sup>.

Under these restricted circumstances, a common phenomenon in the Murafa Ghetto, as well as in other ghettos (for example, in Poland or in Lithuania) was increased dependence on the family framework for the individual's survival and will to live.<sup>42</sup> The motivation to cope and survive often resulted from a sense of responsibility to one's parents, younger siblings, or other relatives. There were many cases where the extended family adopted members who were left without a provider, protecting them and sharing the little that they had.<sup>43</sup> It is known that even in the death camps following the separation of the sexes and the killing of virtually all mothers, children and the elderly, inmates clung to what was left: either to remaining fragments of the family, such as siblings or cousins, or to "surrogate families," such as friends or others with memories of the family that once was.<sup>44</sup>

### **The council and Social Relations in the Murafa Ghetto**

The differences between the groups of deportees in the Murafa Ghetto created a new and special social fabric that was expressed by marked gaps between the groups and a clear disparity between the numbers of surviving deportees from different places of origin. The deportees' need for organization was met by appointing a 'formal' committee that would organize the new 'community' life in the Ghetto, as per Ordinance no. 23.

The local Jews had a committee of their own, the Obshchina,<sup>45</sup> that was active before the deportees' arrival. There was close cooperation between the Obshchina committee and the deportees' committee, which was of utmost importance since all the parties benefited. The Obshchina committee members had no knowledge of German or Romanian and as a result were unable to negotiate with the conquering forces or to



suggest economic or other initiatives. Nonetheless, their advantage over the deportees was their knowledge of the Russian and Ukrainian languages, which enabled them to mediate between the Jewish deportees and the non-Jewish Ukrainian population in creating business ties and exchange trade.<sup>46</sup> In addition, contact with the partisans who operated in the area from the summer of 1943 was critical to the ghetto Jews for learning about the course of the war and about the movement of the German forces in the region.<sup>47</sup>

The first Jewish Committee in Murafa was established by the deportees from southern Bucovina and headed by Nahum Bakal from Suceava. There were other activists with initiative, courage and leadership skills, such as Fucs of Suceava, Sternshus of Kimpolung, Dr. Drimer of Radautz, and Pechtholz and Dr. Schechter of Itzkani,<sup>48</sup> all of whom had already been public activists in their own hometowns. Nahum Bakal's son David (Vico) Bakal states:

"Shortly after our arrival, in the small room in which we lived in the ghetto, a group of activists gathered who were already known for their activism in their hometowns in southern Bucovina: Drimer of Radautz, Zand from Gora Homora and Baruch Sternshus from Kimpolung, Pechtholtz from Itzkani, Schechter from Itzkani and others. Thus, spontaneously, the first committee was organized and my father was elected by this group to head it."<sup>49</sup>

This testimony proves that no public elections for the Committee were held, but rather that a few people of initiative elected themselves and volunteered to provide for the public's needs. The leaders of this group henceforth took an active role in the decision-making and policy-setting in the Ghetto. The deportees accepted this "election" without resentment or reservations, probably because the formation of the Committee occurred shortly after their arrival in the Ghetto, when they were still suffering from the shock of their deportation. At this time, the deportees were occupied with daily survival problems and therefore viewed the new Committee with almost complete indifference.<sup>50</sup>

This was, however, a mixed blessing. **On the one hand**, the Committee met the deportees' need for organization in the Ghetto. Another bonus was the seeming indifference displayed by the Romanian authorities regarding the inner affairs of the Jews in Murafa. **On the other hand**, it soon became evident that the Committee had

only a limited capacity to improve the deportees' living conditions and the fate of the newly formed 'community.' In fact, the Committee's role was to serve as liaison with the Romanian authorities and to supply quotas of Jewish workers for forced labor, as required by them and by the Germans. In any case, the room to maneuver between the Romanian authorities' demands and the needs of the deportees was very narrow.

Moreover, with movement in and out of the premises prohibited, the Ghetto became a death trap. Those caught outside the Ghetto area were subject to flogging, imprisonment, and frequently were even shot to death.<sup>51</sup> This isolation prevented any possibility of bringing food or medicine into the Ghetto or forging contacts with the outside world. To these difficulties and hardships, one has to add the structure of the new society formed in Murafa and the deportees' new way of life, which was very different from the one they had known in their old communities. Thus, from the perspective of the Jews' need for organization, electing the Committee was an important element in shaping the fate of the community as a whole, as well as of the individual members.

It should be noted that these elected members headed by Nahum Bakal was a necessary step resulting from the circumstances and the situation.

The first actions taken by the Committee included the establishment of a Jewish police force and several welfare institutions, such as a public kitchen, which provided daily meals to 1,400 people<sup>52</sup>; a hospital with 25 beds; a sterilization facility to combat the lice plague that was causing the spread of typhoid; a pharmacy; and, towards the end of 1943, a temporary orphanage.

Given the extent of the economic disparity between the different population groups in the Ghetto, the elected Committee set the hunger problem as one of its major goals. Thus, in mid-1942, the Committee collected taxes from affluent deportees to build a public kitchen that supplied a bowl of soup once a day to impoverished families. The funds arriving from the Jewish Center in Bucharest were also destined for this purpose. Baruch Sternshus of Kimpolung was in charge of raising funds and resources for the public kitchen (which arrived through Mogilev and Shargorod).<sup>53</sup>

Another serious problem that had to be dealt with was the typhoid epidemic, which erupted in the winter of 1941-1942. Two Committee members volunteered for this activity: Dr. Widenfeld, a physician, and Dr. Leinbord, a lawyer, both from Suceava.

They held explanatory meetings in which the importance of cleanliness and hygiene was stressed as a preventive measure.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, sanitary superintendents were appointed to patrol the streets and to prevent people from defecating in the street. There were three natural small lakes close to the river that flowed near the town, where the locals used to bathe and wash their laundry. Cesspits were dug near one lake for the local sewage, as only a few houses had cesspits in their yards.<sup>55</sup> The Committee ensured that after the latrines were dug, people were encouraged to use them. The newly dug latrines were regularly covered with lime, and the water wells, which were a source of infection and typhoid, were kept clean. In addition, a sterilization facility was built in order to combat the lice that transmit typhoid, and 25 beds were added to the existing hospital. People of means, especially deportees from southern Bucovina, purchased some kerosene with which they cleansed themselves daily. They also washed themselves daily, even when it was extremely cold outside.<sup>56</sup>

As previously mentioned, one of the Committee's tacit roles was to supply quotas of Jewish workers for forced labor to serve the Romanian and the German authorities. Before the election of the Jewish Committee in Murafa, immediately upon the arrival of the deportees in November 1941, the recruitment of Jewish workers was being carried out forcefully by the local Ukrainian militia. Zvi Weinberg, among others, describes in his memoirs how he and many other Jews were abducted from their homes in the middle of the night, with great brutality and violence, and were taken to work clearing 2 m-high snow in temperatures below 30°C. In addition to providing for work such as clearing snow, the Committee was required to supply quotas for forced labor at various remote sites located far from the Murafa Ghetto. Lists and quotas for forced labor were received from the Gendarmerie headquarters in the Mogilev Ghetto.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, the Jewish police force was established to prevent the arbitrary hijacking of Jews to forced labor, to escort those who went to work and to supervise them.<sup>58</sup> Supervising the deportees during forced labor evoked great resentment towards the police. Both the Committee and the Jewish police faced the same dilemma: On the one hand, they had to meet the Romanian demands and supply their quotas, while on the other hand, they had to deal with the frequent attempts by the deportees to get released from work. The police were also charged with instilling order on market days, when the vendors fell victim to theft and quarrels.

The Jewish police unit worked in concert with the local Gendarmerie. Richer individuals could get an exemption or arrange a relatively comfortable job by paying a bribe to officials in the Romanian Gendarmerie.<sup>59</sup> However, only a few had the financial means to do so, mostly deportees from southern Bucovina. Connections and relationships with officials could also help secure a more comfortable and less grueling job, such as in welfare services and administration. In the collective testimony of survivors from Murafa Ghetto, Yosele Carmin testifies:

"Being close to an official was very helpful; if you had such a connection, you could be helped... it was based on personal friendship."<sup>60</sup> For example, Gil Kremer, a deportee from Kimpolung, whose father had been a physician in the Ghetto, relates how his widowed mother managed to get a job working with orphan children, following his father's death from typhoid, through her contact with Dr. Schechter, who was the head of the Ghetto in mid-1943.<sup>61</sup>

Others were not as lucky. Many of the poorer Jews, especially deportees from Bessarabia and northern Bucovina, who were unable to pay the gendarmes or who did not have the right connections, could not escape being sent to labor sites that were far away from the Murafa Ghetto. Not only were the work conditions there harsh and difficult, but the workers had to live in the vicinity of the distant work sites. Moreover, being expelled from the camp to do forced labor meant that the family's source of livelihood was in danger. The work was tedious and seldom recompensed by even meager pay, with the reward often being a piece of bread or a bowl of soup. In most cases, compensation was not given as promised, leaving the majority of the deportees with no means of survival and sustenance. In fact, the workers at the sites under German supervision were often murdered as soon as their work was completed, never to return to Murafa again.<sup>62</sup>

Boys and women were taken to work in the tobacco fields as well. Testimonies indicate that many children "volunteered" to work in the tobacco fields, not only because this earned them a bowl of soup but also because they could collect the tobacco leaves left on the ground and then dry and sell them at market to the Ukrainians.<sup>63</sup> Thus, some of the less privileged deportees, particularly those from Bessarabia, used their knowledge of the Ukrainian language to their advantage and succeeded in establishing contact with the local Jewish population, as well as with the Ukrainian non-Jewish population.

Clearly, the issue of forced labor is the strongest indicator of the economic disparity that bred resentment between the rich and the poor<sup>64</sup> From the individual's point of view, one's chances of survival were influenced to a considerable degree by contacts and proximity to the "elite" group in power from South Bucovina, who ran the Ghetto and could ensure food, medicine, and convenient jobs.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the gap between the different groups was very wide, and it is very important to note that at this stage, it would be very difficult to characterize the people who had gathered in Murafa Ghetto either as a group or as a community. Most people were still in a stage of individual shock resulting from their deportation and loss of loved ones, as well as the radical adjustment required to survive and endure the harsh conditions. Therefore, it might be said that the population of Murafa Ghetto were living side by side, **but not yet with each other.**<sup>66</sup>

### **Period of establishment and adjustment**

The period from the summer of 1942 to the autumn of 1943 was characterized as a time of establishment and adjustment. However, the adjustment process of the deportees from Bessarabia and North Bucovina, as well as other deportees to the Murafa Ghetto,<sup>67</sup> was different from that of the favored deportees from South Bucovina. By the summer of 1942, many of the deportees had parted with most of the clothes, valuables, and money they had brought from home, having exchanged them for food and heating during the difficult winter of 1941-1942. Most of the weakest and poorest group among the Ghetto residents had already perished in that first winter because of hunger, cold, and the typhoid epidemics that spread like wildfire in the public buildings where they lived, though it is difficult to estimate how many as there are no data on the numbers of these victims.<sup>68</sup> Those who had survived joined the growing circle of impoverished deportees in the Ghetto, having exhausted whatever meager means they had, while the gap between the affluent and the poor widened.

The differences between the affluent and the poor groups were mainly expressed in their chances of survival and in their quality of life. Unlike the poor group, members of the affluent group did not know hunger and were able to purchase medicine as well as kerosene or other means of disinfection in order to combat the lice that were known to transmit the typhoid disease.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the women from this group could afford to be housewives without working to help support the family<sup>70</sup> since there was no regular school, only children from the affluent group could enjoy private lessons in exchange for a food ration or some money.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, they were able to play improvised games

and enjoy other recreational activities.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, the children of the poor group could not study nor were they able to enjoy any recreational activities in the Ghetto, as they were too preoccupied with daily survival issues.<sup>73</sup>

The deportees from South Bucovina had the resources to launch various economic ventures in order to meet their needs for food, heat, and medicine. Those who had the initiative opened small bakeries and pastry shops; a cantina was opened by 11 partners from South Bucovina<sup>74</sup>; others made soap; dentists like Strona of Cernauti opened a dentistry clinic<sup>75</sup>; and craftsmen, such as shoemakers and tailors,<sup>76</sup> offered their services to the neighboring Ukrainians. Local economic initiatives and contacts with the ruling authorities also facilitated the establishment of contacts with other areas in Transnistria where the deportees had lived, such as Mogilev, Shargorod, or Djurin.<sup>77</sup>

However, the deportees from Bessarabia and North Bucovina, not having the same resources for economic ventures as the deportees from South Bucovina, had to exploit their resourcefulness and initiative to the fullest in order to survive. Moreover, they were not related to the Ghetto leaders and found themselves without the contacts needed to receive benefits or to get an exemption from forced labor. Although, the advantage of those from Bessarabia was the knowledge of the Ukrainian language.

This period also witnessed the replacement of Nahum Bakal, the first head of the Murafa Ghetto Who was replaced by major Gheorghe Botoroaga from Ghetto Mogilev.

David (Vico) Bakal explains that his father was removed as the head of the Ghetto for assisting some Jews who had escaped from Smerinca to Murafa:

"A group of Jews came from Zemrinka asking for shelter in Murafa. They told us about the German deeds and about the atrocities, the shooting in the pits, abuse, etc. We didn't believe them at first, but as time went by we realized that they were telling the truth. And then my father gave them identity cards which he signed in the name of Nahum Bakal... This was the punishment of my father instead of being executed."<sup>78</sup>

Although this testimony was confirmed by other witnesses,<sup>79</sup> other testimonies indicate that there were some objections and reservations about the Committee's conduct. It appears that when the deportees became as

accustomed to life in the Ghetto, all of the above-mentioned factors led to the changes in the composition of the first Committee.<sup>80</sup>

For a very short period, and temporarily until the appointment of a new Ghetto head, Pechtholtz from Itzkani served as the head of the Committee.<sup>81</sup>

However, soon afterwards in the summer of 1943, the Committee in Murafa was replaced again and when Dr. Schechter from Itzkani (a physician), was elected to head the Committee. He held this position until the Russians entered Murafa on 19 March 1944 and liberated the Jews. The survivors' testimonies indicate that they were satisfied with Dr. Schechter's conduct and functioning,<sup>82</sup> praising his decency and sensitivity to their plight. According to their testimonies, the hardships in the Ghetto were mitigated until liberation under the leadership of Dr. Schechter.<sup>83</sup>

Even during this period until the end of the Ghetto's existence, the leadership continued to be from the deportees of southern Bucovina. They always ended up as the Ghetto leaders, who enjoyed the advantage of being at the center of power and held the authority to make decisions about the internal organization of Ghetto life (of course, within the limits set by the Romanian Law and the arbitrariness of the Head of the District and Administration). This was demonstrated in various testimonies of survivors, who referred to those from South Bucovina as "the bourgeois" and "the princes."<sup>84</sup> These statements further demonstrate the economic stratification among the Murafa population between the deportees from South Bucovina and the deportees from other places.

From the fall of 1942, a spontaneous and informal mutual aid system began to evolve internally, as people of means within the Ghetto helped to provide food and medicine to the poorer group<sup>85</sup>. It became known that on a certain day, a slice of bread could be found at a certain house, while on another day, a bowl of soup or a potato could be obtained from another family. The donating families did so anonymously<sup>86</sup>. When the pressure started to ease, cultural activities were also initiated by the deportees from southern Bucovina, including poetry reading, singing, and lectures<sup>87</sup>.

Thus, it became possible to develop a sense of 'community' involvement in the Ghetto between the affluent and the indigent, expressed mainly by help with food and medicine. These feelings of empathy and compassion towards the weaker groups reflected the early beginnings of returning to the norms of the community that had

previously existed in their hometowns before the deportation. This phenomenon indicates that at this stage, the community was starting to be defined by the status of the collective rather than by individual situations.<sup>88</sup>

In the end of 1943, money and packages started to arrive from Romania, with assistance coming in from the Jewish Aid Committee in Bucharest.<sup>89</sup>

Various other sources of institutional aid and economic initiatives began to better the situation inside the Ghetto as well. Although this outside help arrived late and was insufficient, it was still crucial for the survival of the Jews of Murafa.

By the end of 1943 and until liberation in March 1944, the Jews had established themselves locally. Rumors and news of the defeat of the German army in Russia raised their hopes of liberation, and conditions in the Ghetto further improved once Romania lost confidence in Germany's victory. The changes taking place on the front and the renewed relations with Jews in Romania led to a feeling that the situation was stabilizing, at least from the perspective of the Ghetto residents. Rumors about the return of the Jews to Romania were validated when survivors testified about the return of Dorohoi deportees to Romania<sup>90</sup>, and especially when the orphans were moved from the orphanage to Bucharest. This instilled hope among the deportees that the deportation period was about to end and that they would soon be returning home.

### **Summary and conclusions**

There was a clear disparity between the numbers of surviving deportees to the Murafa Ghetto from different places of origin and marked gaps between the groups, resulting from both their deportation conditions and their historical circumstances under which they began their lives in Transnistria. The Murafa Ghetto represents the formation of a population composed of two different groups: one, the local Jewish population, and the second, a group of deportees that was further divided into two polarized groups, those from Bessarabia and northern Bucovina and those from southern Bucovina. The deportees of South Bucovina comprised the majority in the small ghetto and played a dominant role in organizing and running its daily life.

The survivors' testimonies indicate that during the first period of the Ghetto's existence, until the spring-summer of 1942, the deportees were withdrawn, immersed in themselves and in their families. The form and structure of the Ghetto were different from their own communities and way of life in their hometowns. This period was



characterized by coping with the shock of deportation, the terror, the loss of loved ones, and the hardships of daily living in the struggle to survive. The harsh reality taught the poorer deportees that in order to survive in such a polarized community, the members' own resourcefulness was required to exploit work opportunities, to obtain food, and to protect the nuclear and extended family. Given the inequality, the survival chances of individuals without contact with the main leadership and without means to bribe the authorities were slight. Unfortunately, this is a phenomenon that is found in all ghettos.

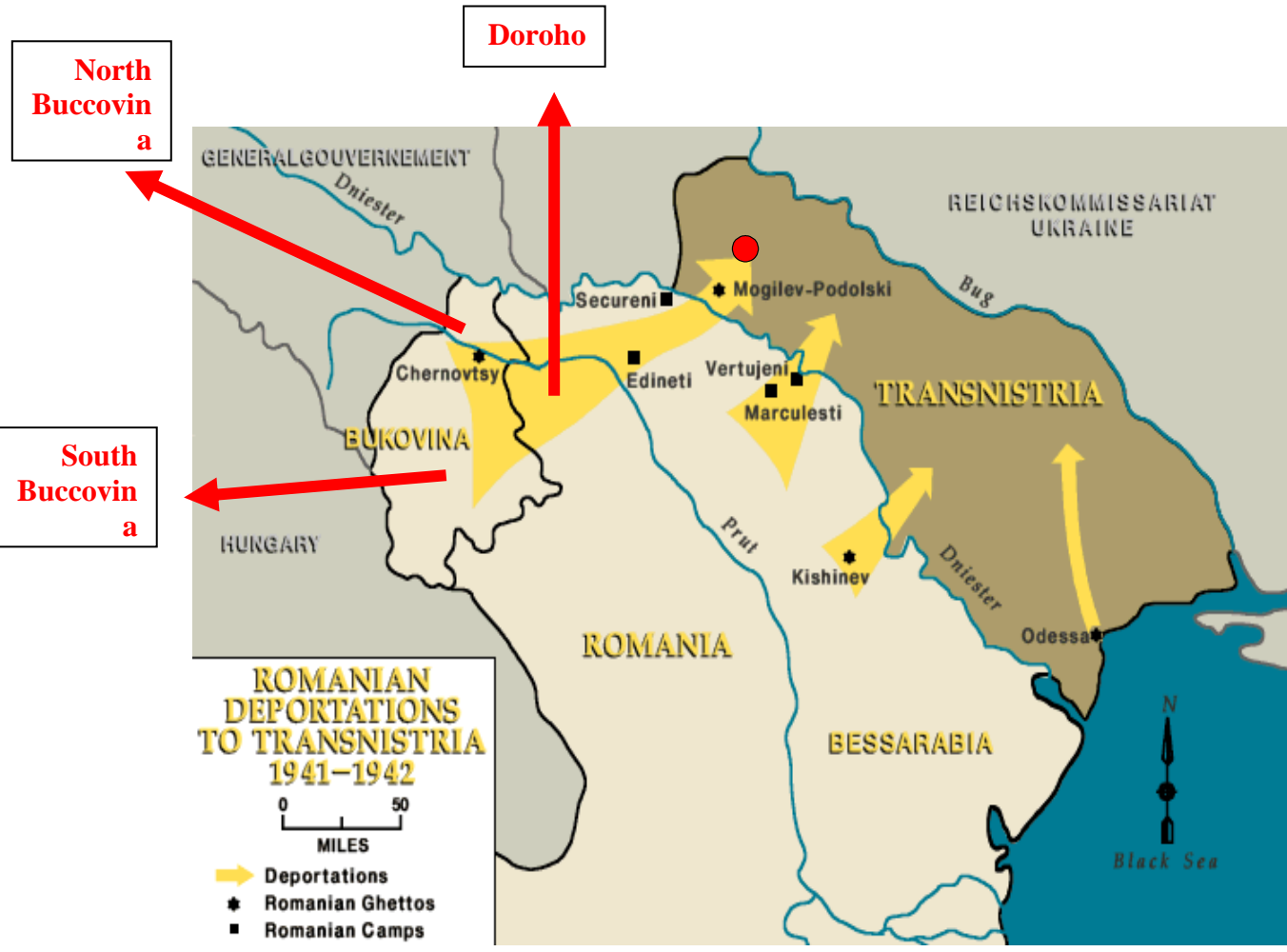
The advantages of the deportees from southern Bucovina were their economic robustness and the rise of the first Ghetto leaders from among their own dominant group. The testimonies and David Bakal's memoirs<sup>91</sup> show that for the leaders, the question of solidarity or instilling a sense of identity was not addressed at all in the first year of their stay in the Ghetto. The leaders were more concerned with severe existential hardships, such as housing, morbidity, starvation, and poverty, for which they had to find immediate solutions. Therefore, the prompt establishment of various welfare institutions, the Jewish Police, and contact with other ghettos were the highest priority and the first steps taken by the leadership towards forming a community in the winter of 1941-1942.<sup>92</sup>

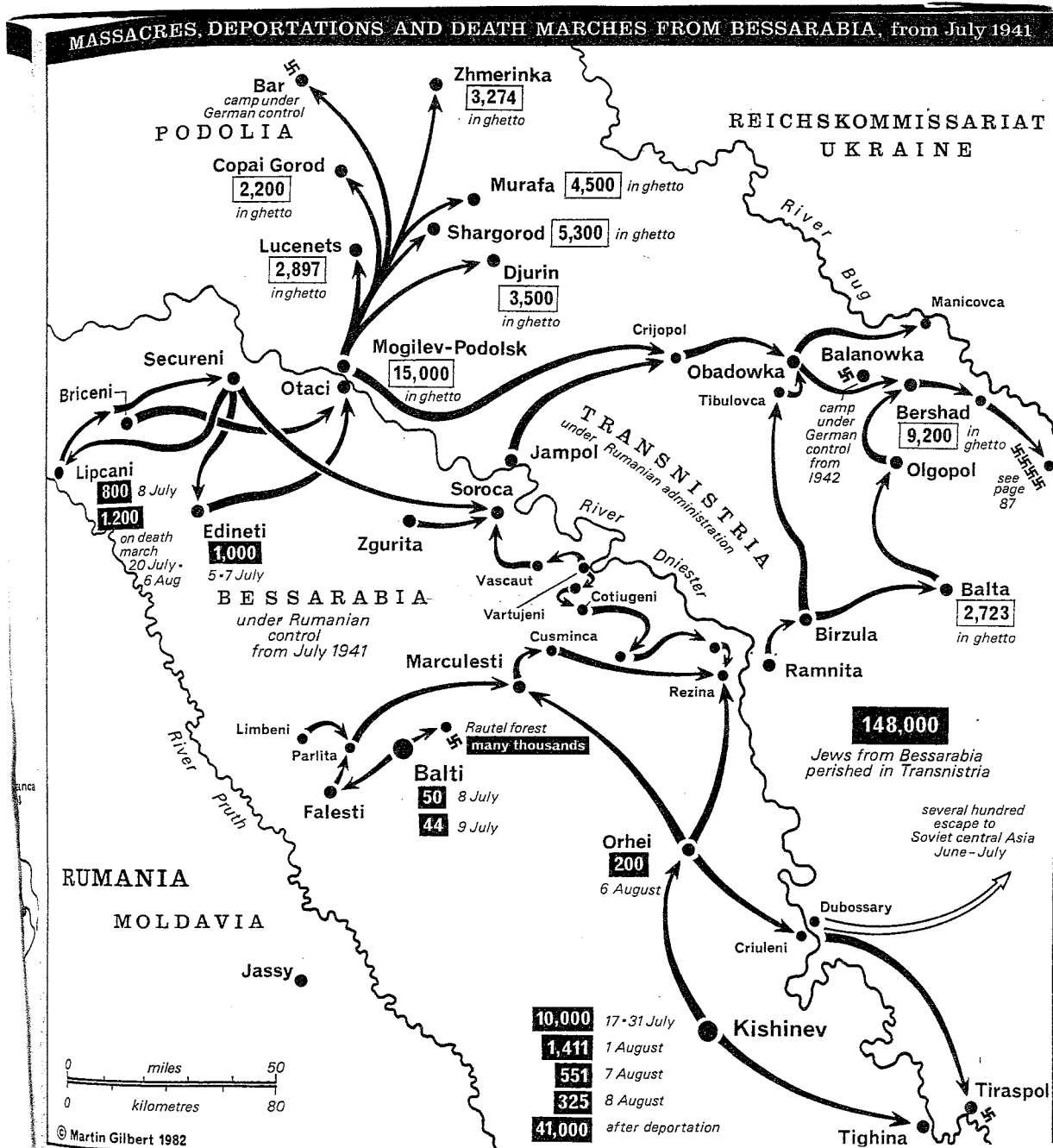
Soon after, in the summer of 1942, began the first signs of construction of a community. The inequality between the affluent and the indigent groups created a new and special social fabric that was expressed by spontaneous mutual assistance. These feelings of empathy and compassion towards the weaker groups reflected the early beginnings of returning to the norms of the community that had previously existed in their hometowns before the deportation. This phenomenon indicates that at this stage, the community was starting to be defined by the status of the collective rather than by individual situations.

The characteristics of the Murafa Ghetto, with its small size and its strong leadership, explain the ability to structure a sense of solidarity within the community despite the extreme social gaps. It was however, a long and painful process that left many with the feeling of being deserted by their brothers. The exceptional polarization between the different groups in the small Murafa Ghetto, the special contacts formed with the local Jews, and the mutual aid that evolved within the community made Murafa Ghetto a unique case as compared to other ghettos.

Appendices

Figure 1 – Map showing the deportations to Transnistria





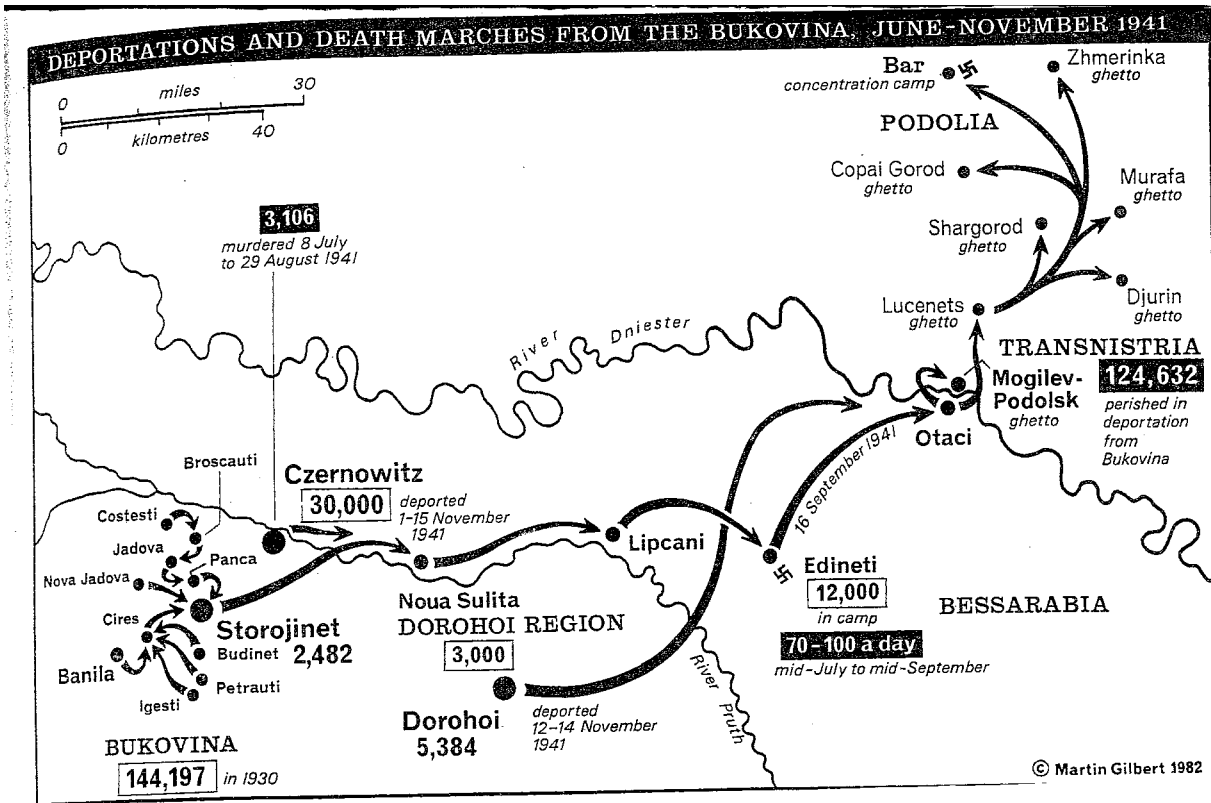
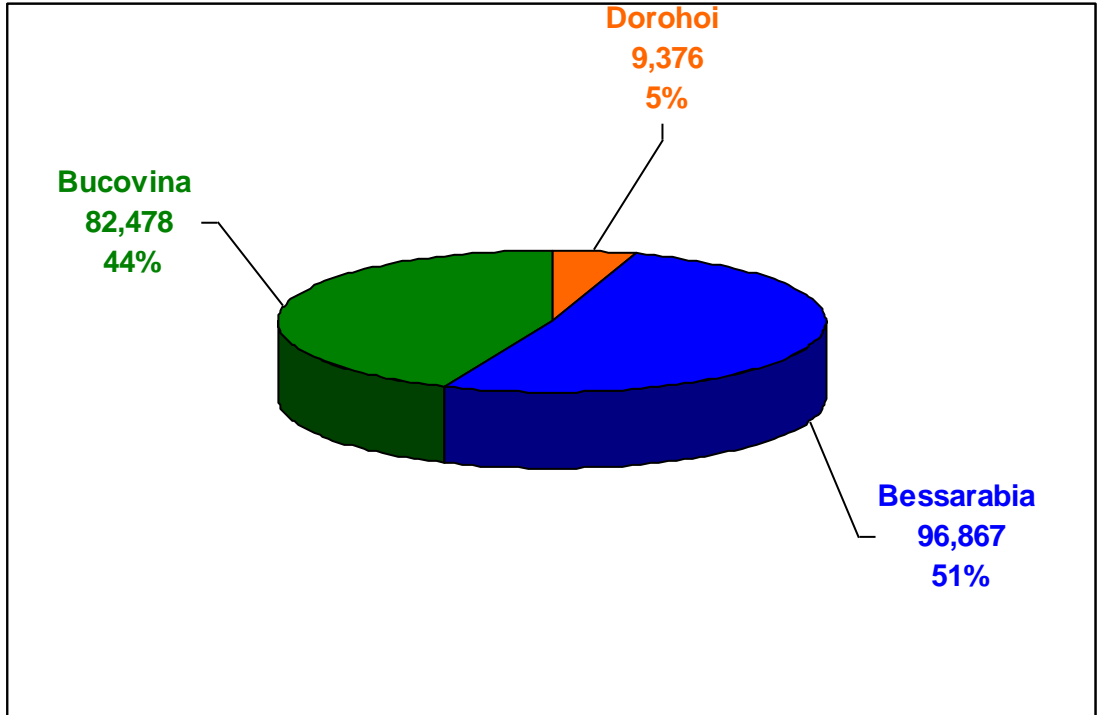


Figure 2: The numbers of Jews deported to Transnistria

The number of Jews deported by the end of 1941



Deportations by the end of spring – summer of 1942

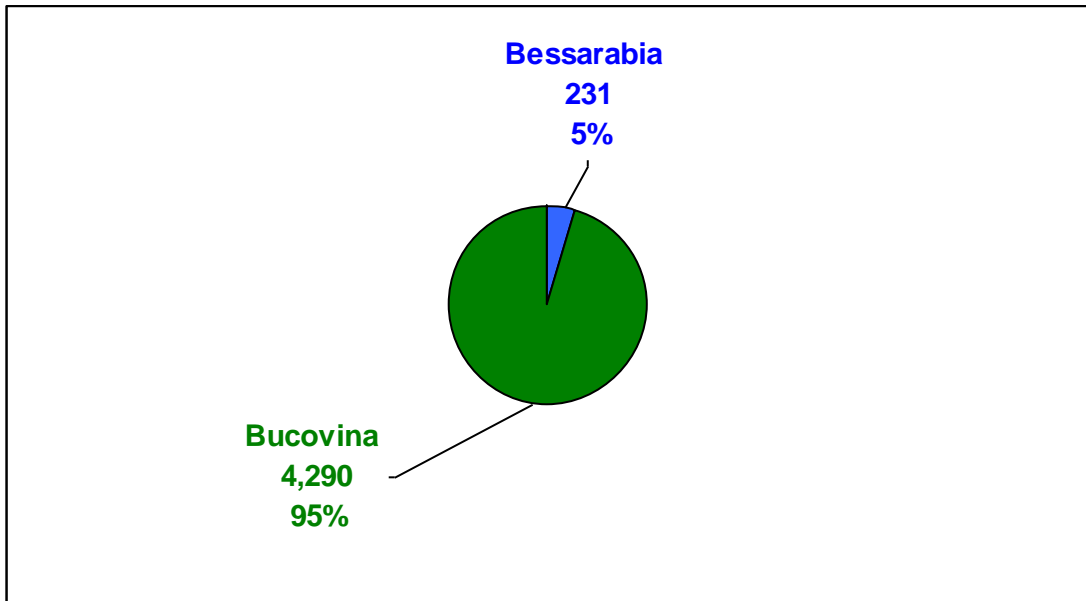
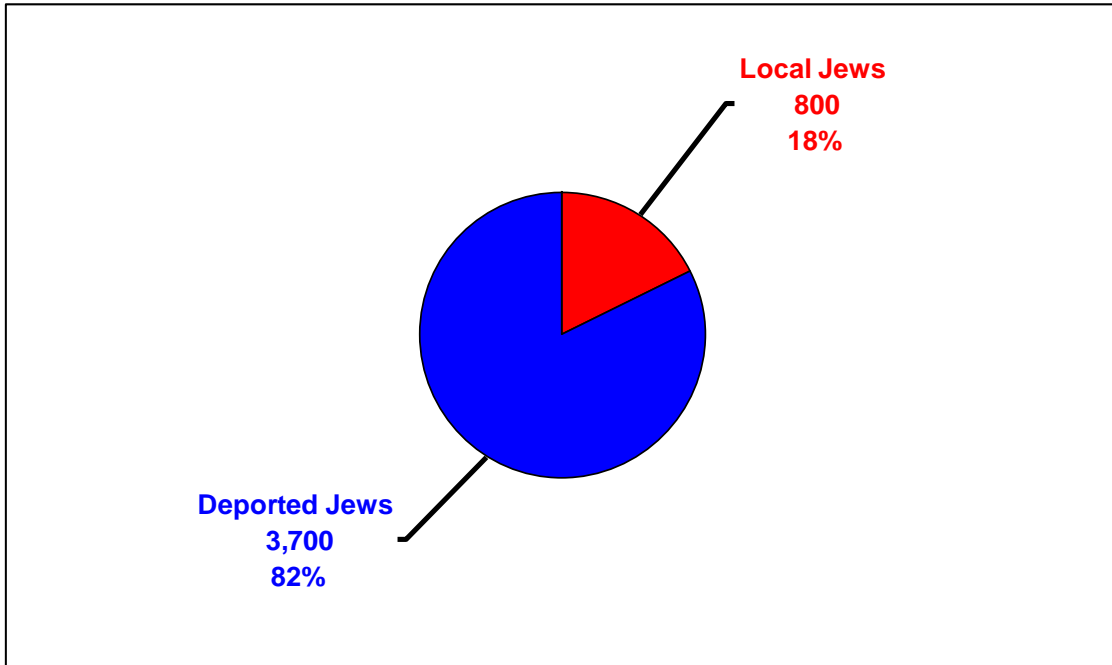
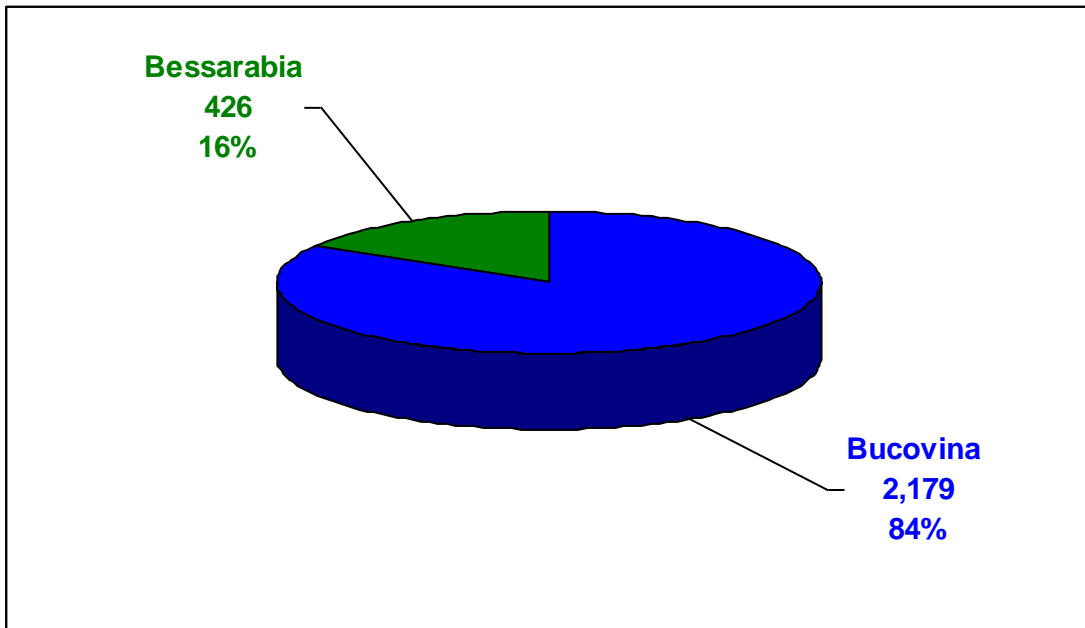


Figure 3: The number of local Jews and deportees at Murafa Ghetto

Number of Jews in Murafa in March 1943



Number of deportees from Bucovina and Bessarabia in Murafa Ghetto



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- <sup>1</sup> Deportees from Suceava, Kimpolung, Radautz and Gora Homora.
- <sup>2</sup> It should be noted that although in Poland and in Lithuania were small ghettos as well, still, ghettos in Transnistria were smaller.
- <sup>3</sup> For an elaborated and comparative approach, see: Ringelblum Emmanuel, *Diary and Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1992; Trunk Isaiah, *Judenrat* (in Hebrew), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1979; Unger Michal, *Lodz: The last Ghetto in Poland* (in Hebrew), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995 ; Einat Aron, *Internal life in the Vilna Ghetto*, PhD dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2006. Beginning of established social aid in Murafa Ghetto: spring-summer 1942.
- <sup>4</sup> More in-depth discussion in this context, see: Ofer Dalia, *The Ghettos in Transnistria and Ghettos under German Occupation in Eastern Europe – a Comparative Approach*, in: Dieckmann Christoph und Quinkert Babette (Herausgegeben), *Im Ghetto 1939-1945, Neue Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld*, Wallstein Verlag , 2009 ; Ibid. Ofer Dalia, (see fn 4).
- <sup>5</sup> Ancel Jean, *History of the Holocaust ROMANIA*, 2 Vol (Hebrew), Vol 2, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 2002, p. 757-759.
- <sup>6</sup> Ofer Dalia, *Life in Transnistria Ghettos, Research Compilation – Yad Vashem*, 25, 1996, p. 177.
- <sup>7</sup> (Vomi - Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle), Shachan Avigdor, *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria*, (in hebrew) Lohame Hagetaot, 1990, p. 143. The Vomi was founded in 1936. As part of its function, it trained the German minorities living abroad to act according to the needs of the Nazi state. In 1941 it was annexed to the S.S. and became one of its divisions. The Vomi commando units, helped by the Ukraine militia and Romanian Gendarmerie, executed in December 1941 70,000 Jews in Golata district, most of them from south Transnistria, some of whom had escaped the Odessa massacre, and others from Bessarabia and Bucovina, who fled or were deported to this region following the German-Romanian occupation.
- <sup>8</sup> Ancel Jean, *History of the Holocaust ROMANIA*, 2 Vol (Hebrew), Vol 1, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 2002, p. 574-577.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. Ancel (see fn 2). p.539-570.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. Ancel, (see fn 8), p. 569; Carp Matataias, *Cartea Neagra*, Vol 3, Buuresti, Diagonal, 1996, p. 41-42.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid. Ancel, (see fn 5), p. 789.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid Ancel Jean, (see fn 5) , p. 1358.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 1360.
- <sup>14</sup> Steinovitzer Shlomo (Ed.), *The Book of Hotin Community (Bessarabia)*, published by the Association of Israelis of Hotin (Bessarabia) Origin, Tel Aviv 1974, pp. 84-85.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid. Steinovitzer (see fn 14).
- <sup>16</sup> Avni Sh. (Ed.), *A Memorial Book for the Jews of the Community of Kimpolung-Bucovina and the Region*, A, The Organization of Israelis of Kimpolung-Bucovina and the Region Origin, Tel Aviv, 2003, p. 17.

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- <sup>17</sup> Ibid Avni (see fn 17) p. 17.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid. Ofer Dalia (see fn 6). P. 178-179.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid. Avni (see fn 17), p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Eelnbogen Israel, YVA, 03-10940; Bakal David, YVA, 03-9277; a Collective interview of 31.3.2009, YVA, vt 9669, and many others.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid. Ancel (see fn 5), p. 1358.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. Ancel (see fn 5), p.1360.
- <sup>23</sup> Lavi T., *The Community Registry Romania*, Vol. 1, pp. 475-478; Fucs Ben Zion (Ed.), *The Book of Suceava Jews and the Neighboring Communities*, Vol. B, Teper, 2007, p. 333.
- <sup>24</sup> There are not numbers of those who fled to the Red Army or those who were killed by the Germans.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. Lavi (see FN 23), A, p. 475
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid. Fucs Ben Zion (see fn 24), p. 123.
- <sup>27</sup> The testimony of Tenenhouse Yehuda to me on 12.3.2009; a similar description is found in Zand-Landau Rite, *The River became Red: A Memoir*, Tel Aviv, Reshafim Publishers, 1992, p. 206; Ibid. Fucs Ben Zion (Eds.), p. 325.
- <sup>28</sup> Extensive descriptions of the Typhoid epidemics are found in ibid. Ancel, (see fn 5) p. 995-1059.
- <sup>29</sup> the overcrowded and inhuman conditions, the hunger, the extreme cold without any means of heating, and the lack of sanitation and hygienic conditions Although they were housed in very crowded conditions
- <sup>30</sup> Those deportees arrived first at Mogilev which was the major town in the region and was badly destroyed during the occupation. Mogilev became a transit post for most of the deportees that were further deported to other places. In Mogilev, those deportees of Southern Bucovina (such as Suceava and Kimpolung) were concentrated in derelict and abandoned public buildings
- <sup>31</sup> All of them from Southern Bucovina.
- <sup>32</sup> Haimovitz (Hirsh) Mali, *To Transnistria and Back*, Tel Aviv, 1988, pp. 23-26. Haimovitz describes the deportation from Mogilev, the escape and return to the town because the father paid a truck driver on the road; see also Eelnbogen Israel, YVA, 03-10940; Bakal David, YVA, 03-9277; Noy Ada, YVA, 03-10913; Noy Haim, YVA, 03-10637; Kremer Gil, YVA, vt 9561; Eelenbogen Yeti, YVA, vt 9539; a Collective interview (see fn 20).
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. Steinovitzer, (see fn 14) p. 85-93.
- <sup>34</sup> Weinberg Zvi, *Diary*, written immediately upon his return from Transnistria to Suceva, given to me personally by the family.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid. Weinberg (see fn 35). Another testimony describing the town of Murafa: Avni S. (Editor), *Kimpolung*, Vol. A, *The Organization of Israelis of Kimpolung-Bucovina and the Region Origin*, 2003, p. 334.
- <sup>36</sup> Hibner Israel, Simcha Weisbooch, Tenenhouse Yehuda, Kostiner Meir (Eds.), *The Book of Suceava Jewry and the Neighboring Communities*, Vol A., Tel Aviv, Teper, 2007, 123-124; see also Eelnbogen



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- Israel, YVA, 0.3-01940; Besler Itzhak, YVA 8292vt, Eelnbogen Yeti, YVA vt9539; Tenenhouse Jenny, YVA, vt8212; Sternshus Kurt, YVA, vt 9370, and more.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid. Lavi (see fn 23) p. 477.
- <sup>38</sup> Eelnbogen Israel, YVA, 03-10940; Bakal David, YVA, 03-9277; Ibid. Sternshus; Ibid. Tenenhouse; Noy Ada, YVA, 03-10913; Noy Haim, YVA, 03-10637; Kremer Gil, YVA, vt 9561; Eelenbogen Yeti, YVA, vt 9539; Kaufman Regina, YVA, 03-6607; Shorek David, YVA, vt 269 and many others.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid. Ancel (see fn 5) p. 796-797.
- <sup>40</sup> Ancel Jean, *Transnistria, 1941-1942: History and Documents*, 3 vol. (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv Press, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center 2003), vol.1 p. 52; for the document see vol, 2, p. 21.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid. Ancel (see fn 5) p. 797.
- <sup>42</sup> Hill, R., *Families Under Stress: Adjustment to the Crises of War Separation and reunion*: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, new York, 1949.
- <sup>43</sup> Ofer Dalia, *Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in the East European Ghetto during the Holocaust*, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. XIV, 1998: p. 143-165; Rosen Sarah, *Community and Family in Shardorod Ghetto: A Case Study of the Efforts to Survive*, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2005, p. 49-65.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid. Ofer Dalia, (see fn 44).
- <sup>45</sup> The local Jewish council.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. Wasserman Yosef; Sorak David, YVA, vt 269.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Collective interview (see fn 20).
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid. David Bakal in a collective interview, (see fn 20).
- <sup>50</sup> Personal interview with Sternshus Kurt, held on 14.10.2009; Ibid. Collective interview (see fn 20).
- <sup>51</sup> Noted also as an article in Ordinance 23; see also Eelnbogen Israel, YVA, 0.3-01940; Tenenhouse Yehuda, YVA vt7748; Kostiner Meir, YVA vt8316; Besler Itzhak, YVA 8292vt, Eelnbogen Yeti, YVA vt9539; Tenenhouse Jenny, YVA, vt8212; Sternshus Kurt, YVA, vt 9370, and more.
- <sup>52</sup> The public kitchen was managed by Leizer Gotlieb, Ibid. Weinberg (see fn 35).
- <sup>53</sup> Sternshus Kurt, YVA, vt 9483.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid. Collective interview (see fn 20).
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, Eelnbogen Israel in a collective interview (see fn 20).
- <sup>58</sup> The survivors' testimonies indicate that among the Jewish placement there were those who performed their duty with "special distinction"
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid. Shternshus ; Ibid Elenbogen.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid. collective interview (see fn 20).

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- <sup>61</sup> Ibid. Kremer.
- <sup>62</sup> For example, the construction site of the bridge over the Bug River in Terihati, or other work sites beyond the Bug River, in the occupied territory controlled by the Germans.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid. Sternshus Kurt.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid, collective testimony (see fn 20), testimony of David Vasserman who feels that his father, a deportee from Hotin who was a pharmacist, was not successful in securing a job at the local pharmacy because he did not have the right connections. Even now, Vasserman still feels the pain when he says: "My father died because of discrimination..."
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid, collective testimony (see fn 20), Yosele Carmin testifies: "Being close to an official was very helpful; if you had such a connection, you could be helped... it was based on personal friendship
- <sup>66</sup> Ofer Dalia, *Im Getto 1939-1945 Neu Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld*, Wallstein Verlag, 2008, p. 39-40, Unlike, "in the in stages of the Polish ghettos, the social structure of the community did not change radically. The social transition occurred in later stages and often because of the German terror, and in particular when the pauperization of the Jewish population worsened. The different demands of the market for specific vocations and laborers eventually altered the pre war status and social class in the ghettos.
- <sup>67</sup> With the formation of the Jewish center in Murafa, in the winter of 1943, another 100 Ukrainian Jews were added to the deportees who had already arrived at Murafa, who fled from various places across the Bug River. They arrived penniless and were crowded in public buildings as noted above.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid, Vasserman Yosef; Ibid, Karmin Yosef in collective testimony (see fn 20)
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid. collective testimony (see fn 20).
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid. Tenenhouse, Ibid. Elenbogen, and more.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid Sternshus Kleir, Ibid Kaufman, Ibid Ada noi, Ibid Tenehouse
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid, Vasserman Yosef; Ibid, Karmin Yosef in collective testimony (see fn 20), Ibid. Sorek.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid. Elenbogen.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid. Sternshus Kleir.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid. Sorek.
- <sup>77</sup> Korber- Bercovici Miriam, *Jurnal de Ghetou*, Kriterion, Bucuresti, 1995, p.35-39.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid. Collective interview (see fn 20).
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid. Collective interview (see fn 21); Ibid. Sternshus Kurt.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid. Weinberg; Ibid. Wasserman.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid. Sternshus Kurt, Ibid Elenbogen, Ibid Tenenhaus.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid. collective testimony (see fn 20).
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid. Sternshus Kurt personal testimony to me 14.10.2002.

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- <sup>84</sup> Israel Elenbogen demonstrated this in his testimony: "We, the people from South Bucovina, were the bourgeois who arrived at Murafa." In the same context, Yosef Vasserman, a deportee from Hotin (Bessarabia), declared: "They (the deportees from South Bucovina) were the 'princes' of Murafa..."
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid. collective testimony (see fn 20).
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid Tenenhaose, Ibid. Elenbogen.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid. Sternshus Kurt
- <sup>88</sup> For an elaborated and comparative approach, see: Enoch Yael and Rodniki Yoav (Eds.), *Introduction to Sociology*, Open University, 2002, pp. 54-58; Christenson J.A. and Robinson JW(Eds.), *Community Development in Perspective*, Iowa State University Press, 1989, p. ix-xiii.
- <sup>89</sup> Money and packages started to arrive from Romania from 19.11.1943. For an elaboration see: Carp Matais, *Cartea neagra*, Diogena, Bucuresti, 1996, P. 402-404.
- <sup>90</sup> About the return of Dorohoi deportees see Shachan, (see fn 7) pp. 265-267.
- <sup>91</sup> David Bakal is the son of Nahum Bakal, was in his twenties at the time of deportation to Transnistria
- <sup>92</sup> Definition found in Enoch Yael and Rodniki Yoav (Eds.), *Introduction to Sociology*, Open University, 2002, pp. 54-58. Community is defined as a unit within the general system that constitutes society. Three dimensions are discerned within the community: **the geographical dimension** – a link to a certain region or territory; **the social dimension** – refers to the interaction between residents, taking place in social meeting places and a **psychological-social dimension** – referring to the sense of belonging and interpersonal affinity among the community members. They share a common cultural system and identify themselves as belonging to the community, such as sharing a sense of equality or a sense of discrimination.